

## SeniorNet: Magazine Notes for December 2016 - January 2017

All the magazines reviewed below are held in the SeniorNet office and are available for borrowing.

### **PC & Tech Authority (December 2016)**

The lead articles in this issue focused on a group test of solid-state drives, and on virtual reality in the workplace. Both are good, solid articles, but, it must be said, neither is likely to be of much interest to most SeniorNet readers. Even so, there are rewards elsewhere in the magazine.

For example, think about the ubiquitous Kindle. These devices come into their own at Christmas time. Flying up to the family in Auckland, want to take a pile of books - but have just weighed your luggage? One solution is a well-stocked Kindle. You can have well over 200 books on such pocketable devices. Now the original Kindle was essentially for reading. But Amazon decided to expand the concept and integrated the reading device into a perfectly reasonable tablet. This issue reviews the Amazon Fire HD 8. The device has some shortfalls, but the review's assessment is that "you won't find an Android tablet of similar quality for less, especially with such great battery life... a solid choice for anyone looking for a family-friendly tablet, or a cheap, second device to use on their travels."

There are two useful programs on the enclosed DVD: Ashampoo Uninstaller 2017 and Hetman Photo Recovery. The first is described as a program "which can fully remove stubborn applications from your system ... It also has a very full set of PC maintenance tools". The second programme is designed to recover lost images from cameras, memory cards and other such storage. Handy to have in the back pocket.

Our Technical Committee might be interested in an article by an IT consultant who has thought about his field. He writes in some detail about his findings which are:

1. "When you get paid to swing a hammer, everything looks like a nail".
2. "What they say they want is not what they need."
3. "If it isn't fit for purpose, don't try to fix it".
4. "Make it as simple as possible (but no simpler)."
5. "Evolve both the technology and the innovation process. Consider putting your users in charge."
6. "Great technology is only 10% of any effective solution."
7. "Success rarely happens overnight. Keep the faith."

## **PC & Tech Authority (January 2017)**

Editors are on a perennial mission to grab your attention. This one hopes to succeed by telling you the "Top 25 most influential websites shaping your online world". Now this raises an interesting question: how does he know which websites we, as disparate individuals, find most influential in shaping our particular online worlds? Unsurprisingly, I know which websites I personally find most influential and, if asked, I'd probably start with Google, the BBC, and the New Zealand Herald site. But when you search the magazine to discover the methodology behind its ratings, you realise that there's no great science – or intrusive observation – behind this article. The list of websites provided is simply those that this magazine thinks are the most important and influential. Very well, that point having been made clear - what emerges? Well, there's agreement on Google's: it's number one. The BBC News also features - as number six. But I must admit I hadn't heard of WordPress (number nine); IMDB (number 16); Survey Monkey (number 18); and I'd certainly not come across The Register (number 20). You could say this article was a bit of a filler, but it did at least spark some internal debate.

What could spark much more internal debate would be the question of whether or not to employ a (modern) butler. Amazon sincerely hopes you will. Its idea of a modern butler is not the sort of person who runs Downton Abbey, but a highly accomplished voice assistant called "Alexa". She lives in a 83.5 x 83.5 x 235mm tube called an Amazon Echo. This issue reviews the device and says "if you like the idea of having a virtual butler at your beck and call to manage your shopping list, read your kids audiobooks, play music, and generally have something to show off ... then ... this is a piece of smart home technology that's worth its asking price". Fine, but what is the price? It's \$A 179 - but Orwell would not be happy. "Alexa" is not Big Brother but Big Sister. Once again, privacy has gone to the winds.

Reviews abound in this issue. There is a "Wireless mice shootout"; premium gaming headphones are not forgotten; and Kaspersky Internet Security 2017 and Bitdefender Internet Security 2017 are both considered.

There is an unusual article which could appeal to some of our grandchildren. Called "How to make money on You Tube", it's detailed and sensible, but warns against expecting easy pickings.

It's been a New Zealand thing to want a piece of land. Indeed, in times gone by many of us wondered, however briefly, whether farming would be the thing to do. Now, however, from the comfort of your study desk, and without sniffing the grass or having to train your dogs, you can find out. The programme, Farming Simulator 17, takes you down a (virtual) rural road and lets you lose. This enterprising programme is reviewed in this issue, and the key judgement is that "while not necessarily fun in the traditional sense, Farming Simulator 17 is very satisfying to play." Clearly great preparatory material for the next farm stay.

## **TECHLife Australia (Christmas 2016)**

This is a big, fat issue and advertisers will be very happy with it. Not unexpectedly, the focus is on the Christmas sales, and the lead article is on "Gear of the Year: Revealed – Our Picks for 2016's Top Tech across 60 Categories!" As always, this magazine has incisive, informative reviews and, if you're interested in buying something significant in this field, this is a very good place to start. What happens though, if the device you want isn't available in High Street, Lower Hutt - but you've found it on Amazon? Well the editor of *TECHLife Australia* has an article precisely focused to meet your need. It is "Buying Tech from Amazon (safely): your ultimate guide to buying overseas Tech goodies and using them down under". If you thought that, to this editor, "down under" is a happy synonym used exclusively for Australia, (and the article is very much Australia-oriented) – then you'd be right. Even so, provided that New Zealand SeniorNet readers keep this in mind, they'll find much of relevance to their interests here.

Members interested in upgrading their Routers will find useful the article "Wallet-friendly ADSL and Broadband Routers".

Many SeniorNet members are interested in travel; and having good tech equipment – and well-developed apps - can considerably smooth the experience. TECHLife Australia knows this, and pages 65-87 provide excellent, practical advice on the following topics:

- "Get the cheapest flights and accommodation"
- "Create the perfect itinerary"
- "Keep a travel journal"
- "Stay connected everywhere"
- "Beat jet lag like a pilot"
- "Navigate like a local"
- "On the trail of tantalising tastes"
- "Learn the lingo"
- "Discover must-visitor attractions", and
- "Must-have Travel Tech".

In "Learn the lingo" I discovered that the wonderful US Peace Corps and US Foreign Service Institute language training manuals are available, free, online. There are the usual suspects (French, Spanish, Mandarin and so on), but if you want to get off the plane at Nadi being able to say more than "Bula", then, believe it or not, Fijian is here also. Certainly, if you have grandchildren learning languages, then suggest they look at [livingua.com](http://livingua.com). Their parents (not to mention their examiners) could thank you for it.

In “Must-have Travel Tech” I saw a device which could be really useful. It’s called “Promate PowerScale”. As you’d expect it’s an electronic weighing device. But what you wouldn’t expect and what would be very useful is that it includes a built-in 2600 mAh battery (enough to give your smart phone a useful charge), as well as an LED torch. It costs \$US30 and I hope Noel Leeming is reading this.

Apple enthusiasts may be interested in the article “Crack iOS 10’s new Lock screen: check out the extra things you can do while your iPhone or iPad is locked”. This detailed article covers two pages (98 – 99); but Android enthusiasts may be tempted to wonder if, to achieve a simpler life, Apple owners would find it easier just to unlock the device.

An article designed for those interesting conversations which often occur just before SeniorNet workshops begin is “*Future Fantastic*”. The note about it says that it covers “Ten trends we expect to see shimmering on the horizon over the next 10 years and beyond.” Trump aside, what lies in store for us then? The article suggests (and we’d certainly nod our head at some of them) –

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|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Smart Robots                    | 2. Augmented Reality       |
| 3. Autonomous Vehicles             | 4. Blockchain <sup>1</sup> |
| 5. Commercial UAVs                 | 6. Internet of Things      |
| 7. Machine Learning                | 8. Quantum Computing       |
| 9. Software-Defined Anything (sic) | 10. Virtual Reality.       |

Now some of these terms may not be familiar to you, but that’s partially the author’s point. In any case he does his job and clearly explains the concepts involved. But, if you can’t find this issue quickly, remember that Professor Google is close to hand. In that sense, as the editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica unhappily discovered, these days the forecasted future comes upon us with great speed. Uber anybody?

R M D Munro

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<sup>1</sup> As Don Tapscott put it, “The technology likely to have the greatest impact on the next few decades has arrived. And it’s not social media. It’s not big data. It’s not robotics. It’s not even AI. You’ll be surprised to learn that it’s the underlying technology of digital currencies like Bitcoin. It’s called the blockchain.” See <https://medium.com/the-intrepid-review/how-does-the-blockchain-work-for-dummies-explained-simply-9f94d386e093#.g9ksxqhyf>